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about half finished. This creature also would express his opinion on the work.

"Holy father," he said, "if I might utter my thoughts, I would say that this painting is more fit for a tavern-room than for the chapel of a pope."

Unhappily for the master of the ceremonies, Michael Angelo was behind him when he uttered these words, and lost not a syllable of the compliment paid him by Signor Biagio. The moment, therefore, that his visitors were gone, the artist sat down and drew a portrait of his critic, and

placed him among the "Lost Souls," under the flattering character of Midas. This was a revenge suggested, perhaps, by the practice of Dante, who punished those who offended him by consigning them to his *Inferno*.

We may imagine the misery of the poor master of the ceremonies, when he saw himself condemned in this way. He threw himself at the pope's feet, begging for deliverance, and for the punishment of the offender. But Paul professed that he had no jurisdiction. And so Michael Angelo gratified his malicious whim, and went on painting his great picture.



HALT OF THE HOLY FAMILY.—FROM A PAINTING BY DIETRICH.

GABRIEL METZU.

To have seen a few pictures of Metzu, of Terburg, or of Gaspar Netscher, is to have acquired fresh knowledge of the manners of the Dutch citizen of the time of the Stadtholder, of his costume, of his physiognomy, of his courtesies, of his mode of life, and even of his style of thinking; and this knowledge is to be gained from such a study, as well as from history and description. To be sure, the painting would be unintelligible without the book; for the pencil would create mysteries without the pen, though it is the fashion among the critics of art to say that their craft is superior to that of the writer. But what would a whole gallery, as vast as the Vatican, of historical portraits be worth, if the biographies of the individuals did not exist? What would all the Sculptures in Nineveh tell us, if the sacred and the classic records did

not interpret their mystical tongue? What frescoes could have told us Roman history, if Livy had not written? or what painter could have left such a familiarity with old Spanish manners as we have derived from the literary pictures of Cervantes? We cannot, therefore, agree with the few artists who are able to write at all, that whole libraries of information are rendered superfluous by the paintings of one master. No one will suspect us of a wish to depreciate a branch of art, but it is just to that art itself to remember its office, and not to claim the dominion in a realm which belongs to another genius. From a picture we may learn the fashion of a mantle or a boot, the style of ornamenting a chimney-piece or a chair, the mode of wearing a beard or a wig; but the spirit and moral of all valuable history is still reserved

exclusively for the pen ; and the painter in this department must be for ever subordinate, and illustrate what the superior artist—of words and thoughts—describes and explains.

Nevertheless, as we have admitted, such a painter as Gabriel

spice was first collected for them, and when their exchanges began to grow opulent by the trade with Borneo and Sumatra. In the pride of his freedom, after the yoke of Spain has been broken, he appears before us, a formal citizen, methodical in



THE UNEXPECTED VISIT.—FROM A PAINTING BY METZU.

Metzu is, in some respects, an historian. He exhibits, in dramatic groups, the national manners of his time. In his pictures we see the Hollander of the age when the United Netherlands were first reaping the riches of the Indian isles ; when

his life, and very systematic in the conduct of his affairs. His house is to him a world ; he gathers into this one place, around this pleasant centre, as many delights as were heaped up in the ancient palaces of the kings of Ecbatana and Susa.

The ships of his country—perhaps his own ships—have for him traversed the ocean from one zone to another,—have searched for porcelain and amber in Japan, for ginger in Malabar, for pepper in Java, for precious canes and drugs in Malacca. From the farthest parts of the world, the famous islands of the Malays, they have brought him all that could enrich his home, benefit his family, and charm away the dreariness of mind naturally inspired by the cold sky and long winters of the north. Asia sends him its muslins, its spices, its diamonds, its feathers of the bird of Paradise, its ivory and camphor. The ices of the Pole have furnished him with those splendid furs, to border the velvet mantle which his wife or his eldest daughter is proud to wear, even in the warmest apartment of the house. The birds, the insects, the shells, and minerals of the remotest lands, fill his cabinets, exquisitely arranged under covers of glass; and, protected in the same way, the rarest plants, the most delicate Persian lilies, the sumptuous tulips, flourish and are cultivated under his inspection. His furniture, wrought with extreme taste, and preserved with the utmost care, suffers no changes from the caprices of fashion, but is transmitted from father to son, one generation after another. The canopy of his bed is supported on pillars of carved ebony, and hung round with drapery of green damask. Hanging from the roof a mirror of gilded copper is twined round with wreaths of elegant workmanship. The floors of the rooms are waxed into beautiful lustre; the glass is finely cut; the lintel of the door is richly carved; the furniture shines with polish; and the light, at morning or evening, falls across bright variegated tapestries, which moderate and harmonise it with the tone of the whole interior. The manners of the Dutch at that period, as well as the material physiognomy of their citizen life, their interiors, their furniture, the luxury and decoration of their apartments, are delineated in the pictures of Metzú with a charming freedom, which is the more attractive since it appears to be entirely without effort on the part of the painter. His walls, after a lapse of two hundred years, would afford materials for the complete restoration of a Dutch interior, just as architectural fragments enable us to build up a perfect temple of antique proportions. And the representation would be an interesting study, harmonising so faithfully as it would with the spirit of the seventeenth century, with the climate and natural characteristics of the country the manners of the inhabitants, and the historical circumstances associated with the fortunes of the merchant classes of Holland, then the masters and leaders of the trade of the world. And they to whom nothing is insignificant which relates to the intimate life, the familiar habits of a people that once filled the globe with the fame of their achievements, will discover nothing puerile in such remarks or such details. It is indeed delightful to enter, favoured by the painter Metzú's introduction, one of those warm Dutch interiors, which were, unlike the Italian houses of the same period, so inaccessible to strangers. It is most frequently by a glimpse through a window, opening in the centre of the piece, that he admits us into the comfortable privacy of a fashionable lady's boudoir, in which he allows us to surprise her in her graceful morning attire, writing some important letter, or completing her toilette, in expectation of a wished-for visitor; or reclining on a couch and touching the strings of her lute into the expression of the thoughts and desires of her heart.

Metzú possessed a power of interesting, not only the eye, but the mind, by the representation of the most simple acts of domestic life. A lady engaged in sealing a letter, which a servant is waiting to carry to the post, is a subject sufficiently humble, yet, thanks to the finish and excellence of the work—to the attentive care bestowed on the delineation of this occurrence, so common in "every-day life"—the picture attracts and rivets our attention. If the painter's touch were less precious, if the details were not so well chosen and so discreetly managed, no one would pause a moment to examine them. But it is impossible not to notice with care that which the artist evidently conceived to be of such importance, and in which the composition is so admirable, that the general effect

surpasses that of many ambitious pictures, possessing no little merit. It is impossible not to feel curious; not to ask, "To whom is that fair lady, in her elegant *negligée*, writing so careful a letter this morning, and so delicately pointing a sea on the wax? and what means that light but significant smile on the lips of the waiting-maid who attends to carry away the letter, standing with her apron rolled up, and her sleeves turned above the elbows?" And in the background, the closed curtains hint that the bed is still unmade; and the lady, in her half-completed toilet, tells us that she has passed the night more in dreaming than in sleeping.

The expression, so to speak, of Metzú's pictures is often so subtle that it is not caught at the first glance of the eye. Dutchmen's faces, in general, appear imperturbably tranquil, immovably phlegmatic. It is no easy matter to discover in them the latent smile or the reserved sentiment. But, upon a closer observation, it will be found, that there is not one in which, under an exterior perfectly calm, there is no play of thought or feeling. Of course, this remark must refer solely to the originals themselves; for, in the engravings from them, however faithful the engraver may have been, there is unavoidably a loss of some volatile and fleeting essence, as it were, which the painter diffused over his picture,—some airy and spiritual tone, impossible to fix or copy, which was not created by the use of any particular colour or form, but the absence of which, intangible and indescribable as it is, denaturalises the work. The solemn citizens of Metzú bear, in their placid countenances, not the expression of indifference or *ennui*, but of serene souls, in which enjoyment is produced by repose, confidence, and content. We perceive at once that on this surface, apparently so impassive, the least emotion would leave its trace, and that the lightest thought could be interpreted to the sight by the almost imperceptible motion of the lips and eyes. There is a young girl receiving a declaration, in a charming picture called "A Lady tuning her Guitar." Her eyes are raised to look on the countenance of her embarrassed lover; a half-secret gladness beams through her face; something like self-love heightens the carnation on her beautiful cheeks, more glossy than satin; and a change seems visibly coming over all her features. A Spanish lady would not display this, so general would be the vivacity of her countenance and the play of expression in her eyes. But a fair Hollander is seldom disturbed from what Tasso would call "the beautiful serene of her face;" the angers or disappointments of her soul only betray her into the expression of a moderate melancholy, and the gratifications of a flattered heart, which in others would produce a brilliancy of smiles, mark her cheeks with a very gentle dimple. If we criticise the valuable painting, in the collection of the Duc de Choiseul, which is known as "The Hunter's Return," the same delicacy is noticeable in the expression of the lady, and the same quietness in her attitude. Attired in a rose-coloured bodice and a skirt of white satin embroidered with gold, she is looking at a miniature and chatting with her maid, of whom we know not; but at the very moment her husband, coming home from the chase, enters abruptly the apartment of his lady. The conversation in an instant is cut short; the maid puts her fingers on her lips, and her mistress, pretending to play with the spaniel whom she strokes with her hand, awaits with downcast eyes and unmoved countenance the first words her husband is about to address to her.

There are masters of the Dutch school who accumulate innumerable details in their pieces, but animate them with no spirit whatever. They make the representation of manners a pretext for a ridiculous assemblage of furniture, glass, lustres, china vases, and all sorts of curiosities; their interiors are inconveniently crowded bazaars. Metzú, on the contrary, being a man of intelligence and taste, only brings into juxtaposition with his personages such things as are essential to the meaning of his composition, to illustrate the adventure, or explain the conversation. His skill in painting inanimate objects was marvellous; but he never allowed it, like the *Præ-Raphaelites* of our own day, to draw him into a vulgar deference to a vulgar taste; and yet, how perfect was the

finish he bestowed on such simplicities! He could weave over one of his floors a Turkey carpet, or elaborate the decorations of a gold or silver cup, or paint the transparency of Bohemian glass, or of the wine that glowed and sparkled half-way up to the brim of his crystal goblet! Glasses, be it remembered, were of great importance in his pictures, for the life of a retired Dutch citizen was chiefly passed in smoking and drinking, to dull his intellect, and to degrade him into premature and unnatural imbecility. But we do not see in Metzu's pieces the heavy horn cups perpetually passed from hand to hand by the peasants of Van Ostade; his are fine and elegant glasses, tall or shallow, such as were worthy to be filled with Haarlem beer, glasses cut into octagons, with prismatic edges, which seem richly to stain the light. In some the chalice forms a cone reversed on the foot of a héron or the neck of a swan, or ends in a trumpet shape.

One feature, particularly remarkable in most of the pictures of Metzu, is the shape of the chimneys of that period. In general, the mantel-piece belongs to the Corinthian or Composite order; the entablature rests on columns of fine marble, sea-green, gold-veined, or jasper-coloured. Sometimes it is black and white. Frequently, instead of pillars, there are Caryatides, representing creatures as beautiful women down to the waist, but terminating in the form of fishes. Others are carved in satyrs, such as we see in our gardens; and a specimen of this kind may be found in the collection of Sir Robert Peel—a woman tuning her voice to her master's viol. Occasionally the comic is enriched with a bas-relief after the antique. The Italian Renaissance had imported into the north those noble models of architecture which produced in France the palace of Fontainebleau, the chateaux of Anet and of Blois, and in Spain the palace of Madrid. Gradually this renewed taste for the antique spread into Holland, where it flourished during the age of that Louis XIV. whom stupid historians have denominated "great," a hundred years after it had influenced the style of France. But such chimney-pieces peculiarly suited a people like the Dutch, who lived so much in the midst of their families; and it is not surprising that such great care was bestowed on the delineations of them by a painter so intimate with their private life as Gabriel Metzu.

In the love-scenes painted by Metzu, the artist's intention becomes at once apparent, from the care he has taken to make his "Conversations" *tête-à-tête*. If there are three persons in the piece, the third is insignificant; it is some waiting-maid or page, who brings in a letter on a tray, and looks askance while retiring from the room. Generally music serves as the pretext, or more strictly the preface, to the timid declaration of the cavalier who leans on the end of the chair on which the fair young Hollander sits tinkling her guitar, listening to his protestations, and considering what their value may be. Sometimes he holds a glass in his hand to aid his nervousness, as we may observe in two charming compositions in the collection of the late Sir Robert Peel—one of them entitled the "Music-Master;" or else he pretends to be trying the strings of a violin; but with all his thought intent on one end, he seizes every occasion to interpose a word between the notes. "Chamber-music was a new revelation to me," says the affected French author of a recent extravagance;

"it explains to me the secret and the ideal of Northern life."

There is something delicate in the compositions of Metzu, and something more than delicate in the touch of his pencil. But there is one singular characteristic of his pictures, which critics have not often remarked upon. There are scarcely any in which we do not perceive a personage figuring, who, apparently, was then considered essential to a "Conversation Piece"—we mean the lady's dog, her spaniel with silky flanks, who by his attitude and expression adds much to our comprehension of the group. He tells us, in fact, what the human figures leave unexplained. Let us, for example, notice the piece called "A Charitable Lady." We are at the door of a Dutch house, in a narrow street, and there are two steps to mount to the entrance. A seat of iron-work is on the right, and the mistress of the house is seated there, enjoying the fresh air. A little beggar, passing along, has been asking for charity, and the lady is giving alms with grace and good humour. But Metzu, to show the temper of the household, represents the dog standing on the steps. He, accustomed to see poor persons come thither, regards the young mendicant, not with vicious anxiety and restlessness, but with an air of benevolence, so that the hospitality of that place is there doubly illustrated. The whole composition is simple but charming; a masterpiece of nature and sentiment exquisitely coloured. The house is embowered with foliage; a little stream; another of the numerous canals of Amsterdam, runs beside it by two shady rows of trees; between we discern at a distance one of the tall, quaint clock-towers of the city. A copper-plate glistens on the door, with the name of the merchant who lives within engraven on it; and there is also a bright metal bell. And the name of the merchant dwelling there is set forth as Gabriel Metzu, as if the artist would tell us that he himself was the owner of this hospitable house.

In order not to pass over the details, which are so many charms in the compositions of Metzu, we must notice the ornamental varieties he has introduced into many of his conversation pictures. It is not in useful articles or in objects of art that fashion has undergone most changes. In the seventeenth century the Dutch framers affected different kinds of decorations, according to the importance of the painting and the subject. "The Young Man writing a Letter," a beautiful piece, in the possession of Mr. Hope, represents, suspended from a wall, a picture with a frame most elaborately designed. It contains large flutings, shells, marine plants, and leaves so intertwined and so rich, that our attention is fixed even on this slight accessory. Whether the design was the painter's or a copy of something he had seen, it is certainly a fine suggestion.

Little is known of Metzu's life. Picture-histories give us only the true date of his birth, which was in 1615, and a false date of his death, which they, one and all, fix in 1658. This error was excusable, because it had the authority of Arnould Houbraken, who might have been supposed to be well-informed. Metzu, he says, died at Amsterdam from the effects of a surgical operation performed on him in his forty-third year; but it is clear that he survived the trial, since several of his paintings bear a subsequent date. Many circumstances render it probable that 1669 was the real year of his decease.

WATTEAU.

WATTEAU was the painter of revels, dances, masquerades. His frivolous pencil sought for such subjects as were described in court pastorals, programmes, and books of ceremony. But his delicacy of colouring, the graceful gaiety of the scenes he represented, the ease and freedom of his joyous groups, gained him admission into the Academy, with the title of Painter of Gallant Feasts to the King.

The genius of this skillful colourist, developed very early by an attentive study of Rubens' works, was immediately turned to the class of subjects in which he always principally delighted. His reading was almost confined to pastorals,

interludes, operas, and ballets. He had a strong taste, also, for diversions and spectacles of every kind, and thus fostered a natural inclination, which perhaps owed part of its strength to the influence of one of his masters, Claude Gillot, painter to the opera, who excelled greatly in compositions of a grotesque character. All that is serious or thoughtful in the productions of Watteau appears to have been the inspiration of a later master, Claude Audran, the engraver.

Watteau often drew outlines in red and black chalk, and these studies, whenever they are to be found at the sale of collections, universally excite great emulation among the